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Modelling the optimal phosphate fertiliser and soil management strategy for crops

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1 **Use of a coupled soil-root-leaf model to optimise phosphate fertiliser use efficiency in barley**

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11 **Abstract: (~~200~~192/200)**

12 *Aims* Phosphorus (P) is an essential nutrient necessary for maintaining crop growth, however, it's

13 often used inefficiently within agroecosystems, driving industry to find new ways to deliver P to

14 crops sustainably. We ~~consider a precision agriculture approach which~~aim to combine~~s~~ traditional

15 soil and crop measurements with climate-driven mathematical models, ~~that can~~to optimise the

16 timing and placement of fertiliser applications.

17 *Methods* The whole plant crop model combines an above-ground leaf model with an existing

18 spatially explicit below-ground root-soil model to estimate plant P uptake and leaf mass. We let P-

19 dependent photosynthesis estimate carbon (C) mass, which in conjunction with temperature sets

20 the root-growth-rate.

21 *Results* The addition of the leaf model achieved a better estimate of two sets of barley field trial data

22 for ~~leaf mass and~~ plant P uptake, compared with just the root-soil model alone. Furthermore,

23 discrete fertiliser placement increases plant P uptake by up to 10% in comparison to incorporating

24 fertiliser.

25 *Conclusions* By capturing essential plant processes we are able to accurately simulate P and C use

26 and water and P movement during a cropping season. The powerful combination of mechanistic

27 modelling and experimental data allows physiological processes to be quantified accurately and

28 useful agricultural predictions for site specific locations.

29 **Keywords** Mathematical modelling, phosphate, phosphorus, fertiliser strategy, barley field study,

30 above and below ground

31 **Introduction**

32 The world-wide production of food has increased due to the demands of an ever expanding global

33 human population (Brown, 2012). Due to the lack of land available for agricultural expansion, there

34 is a need to increase yields sustainably by manipulating the existing environment in which crops are

35 grown, and breeding more resource efficient crops. Resource management for arable farming

36 systems is critical to the survival of the human population and large amounts of money and time are

37 needed to elicit the appropriate improvements (Conway and Barbier, 1990).

38 Phosphorus (P) is one of the essential nutrients required for plant growth and plays an important

39 role in photosynthesis, respiration, and seed and fruit production.

40 We are interested in how crops grow and survive in low P environments and how fertiliser and soil

41 cultivation methods are influencing crop performance. A number of studies have considered the

42 response of adding different amounts and rates of fertiliser P; in some soils large effects are seen

43 whereas no effect is seen in others (Bolland and Baker, 1998; Kuchenbuch and Buczko, 2011;

44 Valkama et al., 2011). There are many ways one could apply P to soils; for example incorporating

45 (also known as broadcasting, involves an even spreading of P on top of the soil), placing (also known

46 as banding, involves injecting P into the soil nearer the rooting zone either in row or between rows)

47 or as a coating on seeds. Studies have shown that injecting fertiliser into the soil nearer to the root

48 zone (placing) increases plant P uptake compared to incorporated P (Randall and Hoeft, 1988; Lohry,

49 1998; Owusu-Gyimah *et al.,* 2013). In addition, studies have been conducted to estimate the

50 differences in soil cultivation methods on plant P uptake; for example, conventional plough *versus*

51 minimum tillage (also considering gene variation, George *et al.,* 2011). The idea behind ploughing is

52 to turn over or mix the top 25 cm of soil to loosen the soil for seeding, bury any existing crop

53 residues or weeds, and to provide a good distribution of nutrients for the coming crop. This is in

54 contrast to minimum tillage which enhances topsoil stability against erosion, retains moisture and

55 reduces crop establishment costs, but segregates P content with depth and can leave 30% of crop

56 residue on the soil surface.

57 Due to the rising cost of fertilisers and agricultural machinery, crop production has become a multi-

58 objective optimisation problem to minimise multiple costs while trying to maximise the crop yield

59 and environmental impact of fertilisers. This is a complex problem due to varying climatic conditions,

60 an abundance of technological machines, and availability of more data concerning the states of

61 fields than ever before. Precision agriculture is an emerging field involved with combining the

62 newest technologies to the farming industry, ranging from unmanned drone maps of fields to

63 computer-assisted tractors (Blackmore, 2014). This new technology is enabling automated real time

64 decision making, applying the most effective treatment to crops at the best time for the best price.

65 Mathematical models, supported by experimental data, are needed to help predict best decisions in

66 the short term, and also strategically, to optimise between possible future options. Whilst such

67 models are ~~seldom~~ not always commercially used~~employed at present~~, their potential capabilities

68 are attractive, given that field-scale experiments are both costly and time-consuming, and

69 integration and dissemination of their empirical results is challenging (Selmants and Hart, 2010;

70 Jeuffroy *et al.,* 2012; Sylvester-Bradley, 1991).

71 A plethora of models exist that describe the processes involved in plant growth and the behaviour of

72 nutrients and water in the soil. Each model has its own unique assumptions and is generally targeted

73 at specific scientific problems within the area of agriculture. For example, Greenwood *et al.* (2001)

74 developed a dynamic model (PHOSMOD) for the effects of soil P and fertiliser P on crop growth, P

75 uptake and soil P in arable cropping; Jones *et al.* (2003) describe a decision support system for

76 agrotechnology transfer (DSSAT) which focuses on average plant-environment interactions; and

77 Keating *et al.* (2003) review an agricultural production systems simulation (APSIM) developed in

78 CISRO, Australia which deals with water, N, P, pH, erosion and management issues. At the beginning

79 of the 21st century, modelling 3D architectures of plant roots (RootBox, ROOTMAP, SimRoot,

80 RootTyp, SPACSYS, R-SWMS) has become popular (Dunbabin *et al.,* 2013). In addition, two research

81 groups that model above ground 3D plant structures, Prunsinkiewicz Algorithmic Botany group at

82 the University of Calgary and the Andrieu group (ADEL-wheat model), both use L systems to simulate

83 the above ground structure of wheat plants. L systems, introduced by Lindenmayer in 1968,

84 represent a string of production rules that are used to create geometric structures, ideal for plant

85 development. However all these models do not describe the root-soil interaction explicitly and do

86 not fully integrate functions that occur above ground with ones that occur below ground. Therefore

87 plants of the same genotype are represented alike and phenotypic differences cannot be observed.

88 We hope to address some of these problems by creating a model that links the above and below

89 ground processes in such a way that they rely on one another. Our whole crop model is based on a

90 below ground plant-soil interaction model (Roose and Fowler, 2004b; Heppell *et al.,* 2015) coupled

91 with an above ground leaf growth model based on the seminal work of Thornley (1995).

92 Here we describe a whole crop model that includes a below-ground root model and an above-

93 ground leaf model and which is validated against experimental data on barley with a varying P

94 fertiliser scenario analysis. The development of the model is seen as a step-change in our

95 computational capability to help predict soil P supply, crop P uptake patterns and fertilizer

96 requirements.

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Materials and Methods

Experimental data

Two barley field trial data sets are used, consisting of leaf mass and plant P uptake values at different growth stages (GS31, GS45 and GS91 for spring barley; GS39 and GS92 for winter barley). The experimental data includes different rates of P application (0, 5, 10, 20, 30, 60, 90 kg P ha^{-1} for spring barley; 0 15, 30, 60, 90, 120 kg P ha^{-1} for winter barley) and both sites were classified with an Olsen P index 1 soil. The protocol for this is described in Heppell *et al.* (2015). In addition, we use the climate data, from the UK Met office Integrated Data Archive System (MIDAS), to accompany the spring barley (Inverurie, Scotland) and winter barley (Cambridge, England) data sets for the specific fields in the trial. The climate data consists of daily values for mean temperature (^{o}C), rainfall (mm), wind speed (m s^{-1}) and humidity (%).

Modelling the whole crop

In this paper we extend a root-soil model (Roose and Fowler, 2004b; Heppell *et al.,* 2015) which estimates plant P uptake, with an above ground model which estimates leaf mass (based on Thornley, 1995), to produce a whole crop model. We first describe the root-soil model (hereafter called the root model), followed by the leaf model and then our coupling process to create a whole crop model.

Root and soil model

To model the root system we follow the same approach as described in Roose *et al.* (2004b) and Heppell *et al.* (2015) by modelling two orders of root branches only (main and first order branches). First order roots branch off the main order roots at a given density (ψ_1), branching angle (θ), and each order of roots has a given maximum length and radius (L_0, L_1 and a, a_1 for main and first order roots, respectively). As in Roose *et al.* (2004b) and Heppell *et al.* (2015) we let the root growth slow

120   down as the root becomes longer. Following Heppell *et al.* (2015) we also let the root growth rate (r)

121   be dependent upon temperature *T*,

122   Eqn. 1 $$\frac{\partial l_i}{\partial t} = r(T(t))\left(1 - \frac{l_i}{L_i}\right),$$

123   where l_i is the current length of an order i root and L_i is the maximum length of an order i root.

124   The root-soil model is described by the following two equations for water saturation (Eqn. 2) and P

125   (Eqn. 3) concentration respectively,

126   Eqn. 2 $$\phi \frac{\partial S}{\partial t} = \nabla \cdot \left[D_0 D(S)\nabla S - K_S k(S)\widehat{\boldsymbol{k}}\right] - F_w(S, z, t) \,,$$

127   Eqn. 3 $$\frac{\partial}{\partial t}[(b + \phi S)c] + \nabla \cdot [c\boldsymbol{u}] = \nabla \cdot \left[D_f \phi^d S^d \nabla c]\right] - F(c, z, t) \,,$$

128   where the water flux in the soil, $\boldsymbol{u}$, is given by Darcy's law,

129   Eqn. 4 $$\boldsymbol{u} = -D_0 D(S)\nabla S + K_S k(S)\widehat{\boldsymbol{k}}.$$

130   In the above equations S is the relative water saturation given by $S = \phi_1/\phi$, ϕ_1 is the volumetric

131   water content, and ϕ is the porosity of the soil. D_0 (cm^2 day^{-1}) and K_S (cm day^{-1}) are the parameters

132   for water 'diffusivity' and hydraulic conductivity, respectively (Van Genuchten, 1980). $D(S)$ and

133    $K(S)$ characterize reduction in water 'diffusivity' and hydraulic conductivity in response to the

134   relative water saturation decrease, where the functional forms for partially saturated soil are given

135   by Van Genuchten (1980). $\widehat{\boldsymbol{k}}$ is the vector pointing vertically downwards from the soil surface and F_W

136   is the water uptake by the plant root system per unit volume of soil as given by Roose and Fowler

137   (2004a).

138   For the total P conservation (Eqn. 3), c is the P concentration in soil pore water, b is the soil buffer

139   power characterising the amount of P bound to the soil particle surfaces, D_f is the P diffusivity in

140   free water and d is an impedance factor; $1 \leq d \leq 3$ (Barber, 1984; Nye and Tinker, 1977). $F(c, S, t)$

141   describes the rate of plant P uptake by a root branching structure (Roose *et al.*, 2001). Both F_w and F

142 are affected by the spatially and temporally evolving root structure. Water is only taken up by the

143 main order roots while P is taken up by all roots; see Roose and Fowler (2004b) for details of the

144 derivation. The equation for F_w is given by,

145 Eqn. 5
$$F_W = \frac{2\pi a_1 k_r + (2\pi a_1 k_r k_z)^{\frac{1}{2}}\psi_1(z)}{\pi(a+L_1 cos\theta)^2}[-p_c f(S) - p_r],$$

146 where ψ_1 is the density of first order roots on the main order roots, a_1 is the first order root radius,

147 a is the main order root radius, L_1 is the maximum length of the first order branches, θ is the angle

148 between the main root and the first order branches, k_r is the root radial water conductivity

149 parameter (m s^{-1} Pa^{-1}), k_z is the root axial hydraulic conductivity calculated using Poiseuille law (m^4

150 Pa^{-1} s^{-1}), p_c (Pa) is a characteristic suction pressure determined from experimental data for different

151 types of soil, $f(S) = \left(s^{-1/m} - 1\right)^{1-m}$, where m is the Van Genuchten soil suction parameter (where

152 $0 < m < 1$), and p_r is the root internal xylem pressure (Pa).

153 Root internal xylem pressure (p_r) is calculated by balancing radial and axial fluid fluxes inside the

154 root, i.e. after Roose and Fowler (2004a) we have,

155 Eqn. 6
$$2\pi a k_r(-p_c f(S) - p_r) = -k_z \frac{\partial^2 p_r}{\partial x^2},$$

156 with two boundary conditions; an impermeable root tip (Eqn. 7) and a root internal pressure (P) at

157 the base of the zero order root (Eqn. 8),

158 Eqn. 7
$$\frac{\partial p_r}{\partial x} = 0 \text{ at } x = L,$$

159 Eqn. 8
$$p_r = P \text{ at } x = 0,$$

160 where P is a function of temperature (T), humidity (H) and a base line pressure (p_r^0) for fitting

161 parameters λ_1, λ_2 and λ_3 (see Heppell *et al.,* 2014 for the procedure to estimate them), i.e.

162 Eqn. 9
$$P = (p_r^0 + \lambda_3) + \lambda_1 T + \lambda_2 H.$$

163 The rate of plant P uptake is given by,

164 Eqn. 10
$$F(c, z, t) = \frac{F_0 + F_1}{\pi(a + L_1 cos\theta)^2},$$

165 where F_0 and F_1 are the uptake rates for zero and first order roots derived in Roose *et al.* (2004b).

166 The boundary conditions to accompany Equations 1 and 2 include a soil surface boundary condition

167 for water,

168 Eqn. 11
$$-D_o D(S)\frac{\partial S}{\partial z} + K_S k(S) = W_{dim} \text{ at } z = 0.$$

169 W_{dim} (the flux of water into the soil) is dependent upon rainfall (R), humidity (H), temperature (T),

170 wind speed (WS) and a constant (E) which sets a base line flux i.e.

171 Eqn. 12
$$W_{dim} = \delta R + \alpha H + \beta T + \gamma WS + E,$$

172 for fitting parameters δ, α, β and γ (see Heppell *et al.,* 2014 for how these values were estimated).

173 In addition, we have a boundary condition for the concentration of P (c) at the soil surface,

174 Eqn. 13
$$-D_f \phi^d S^d \frac{\partial c}{\partial z} + W_{dim} c = 0 \text{ at } z = 0, \text{ for } t > 0.$$

175 We set a zero flux at the bottom of the soil (l_W) for both P and water,

176 Eqn. 14
$$-D_o D(S)\frac{\partial S}{\partial z} + K_S k(S) = 0 \text{ at } z = l_W,$$

177 Eqn. 15
$$-D_f \phi^d S^d \frac{\partial c}{\partial z} = 0 \text{ at } z = l_W.$$

178 The initial state of P concentration and water saturation in the soil is given where possible by the

179 initial soil data for the spring and winter barley experimental sites. A uniform water saturation

180 profile is initially set at $S = 0.3$ for the two experimental sites; however for the initial P

181 concentration ($c_0(z)$) we consider two different cases; (1) a uniform concentration and (2) an

182 exponentially decaying concentration:

| 183 | Eqn. 16 | $$\begin{aligned}(1) \quad c_0(z) &= c_A & \text{at } t = 0, \forall z \\ (2) \quad c_0(z) &= A_1 e^{-B_1 z} & \text{at } t = 0, \forall z'\end{aligned}$$ |

where c_A is set to 16 mg P l^{-1}, A_1 is the P concentration at the top of the soil (23 mg P L^{-1}) and B_1 is

the strength of the decay in the concentration of P (0.345). The initial P concentration values (C_A,

A_1 and B_1) come from a best fit to the data sets in Heppell et al., (2015) and are both classified as an

Olsen P index 1 soil (Defra, 2010). To reflect the different fertiliser scenarios being used at each field

site a set amount of P (P_1) (0-120 kg P ha^{-1}) was either applied at the surface ($z = 0$) (P broadcast) or

at a set depth below the soil (D_1) (P placement).

| 190 | Eqn. 17 | $$\begin{aligned}c &= c_0(z) + H(z), \\ \text{(broadcast)} \quad H(z) &= P_1 & \text{at } t = 0, & \quad z = 0 \\ \text{(placement)} \quad H(z) &= P_1 & \text{at } t = 0, & \quad z = D_1 \\ \text{(else)} \quad H(z) &= 0 & \text{at } t = 0 & \quad \forall z\end{aligned}$$ |

Leaf growth model

We have altered a compartmental model developed by Thornley (1995) to describe leaf mass M_L

(kgL), leaf C M_C (kgC) and leaf P M_P (kgP) as well as the concentration of free C $[C] = M_C/M_L$ (kgC

kgL^{-1}) and free P $[P] = M_P/M_L$ (kgP kgL^{-1}) dynamics within the leaves. The leaf model takes into

account non-linear dynamics of formation of leaf litter and leaf self-shading. Additionally we have

made photosynthesis dependent upon P content in the plant (Foyer and Spencer, 1986, Wissuwa *et

al.*, 2005) and we have altered the leaf growth term, G_{sh}, which was dependent on [C] and [P], to

also depend upon the air temperature (A_T), for the winter barley but not spring barley), as well as [C]

and [P]. We don't let air temperature affect spring barley as the growing season is much shorter

compared to winter barley and it is not needed for a good fit to the experimental data. The

governing equations are given below and are represented in a flow diagram on Figure 1, i.e., we

have

| 203 | Eqn. 18 | $$\frac{\partial M_L}{\partial t} = \overbrace{G_{sh}}^{\text{Leaf growth rate}} - \overbrace{\frac{K_{litt}}{1 + \frac{K_{mlitt}}{M_L}} M_L}^{\text{Leaf metabolism/litter}} ,$$ |

Eqn. 19

$$\frac{\partial M_C}{\partial t} = \overbrace{\varepsilon k_1[P]}^{\text{Production of C from photosynthesis}} - \overbrace{f_c G_{sh}}^{\text{Use of C for L growth}} - \overbrace{\beta_c[C]}^{\text{Output of C to phloem}},$$

Eqn. 20

$$\frac{\partial M_P}{\partial t} = \overbrace{-f_p G_{sh}}^{\text{Use of P for L growth}} + \overbrace{F(c,z,t)}^{\text{Input of P from xylem}} - \overbrace{\beta_p[P]}^{\text{Output of P to phloem}} - \overbrace{k_p \varepsilon[P]k_1}^{\text{Use of P to produce C}},$$

where,

Eqn. 21

$$G_{sh} = k_G M_L[C][P]\frac{A_T^{s_1}}{s_2^{s_1}+A_T^{s_1}},$$

Eqn. 22

$$\varepsilon = \frac{k_C M_L}{\left(1+\frac{M_L}{k_M}\right)\left(1+\frac{[C]}{J_C}\right)},$$

where k_g is the leaf growth rate, K_{litt} is the litter rate, K_{mlitt} is the litter Michaelis-Menten constant, K_C is the photosynthesis rate, k_M is the constant accounting for the leaf self-shading, J_C is the C product inhibition constant, f_c is the fraction of total C used for leaf growth, f_p is the fraction of total P used for leaf growth, k_1 is the amount of P used for photosynthesis, $k_p k_1$ is the P loss due to photosynthesis, β_c is the rate of C output from the xylem to the phloem, β_p is the rate of P output to the phloem, $F(c,z,t)$ is the rate of P entry from the xylem (Eqn. 10) and s_1 and s_2 are fitting parameters. Initial values for the leaf (M_L), C (M_C) and P (M_P) mass are 1x10^{-4}, 0 and 1x10^{-7} kg respectively.

Whole crop model

In order to provide feedback between the root model and leaf model, we allow C mass to affect the root growth rate. Increasing C mass will increase root growth which in turn will increase plant P uptake. Through the process of photosynthesis, increasing plant P uptake will also increase C mass, thus creating a positive feedback loop.

The order i root growth rate is now dependent on C as well as temperature, therefore we replace Eqn. 1 with,

224   Eqn. 23 $$\frac{\partial l_i}{\partial t} = r(T,C)\left(1 - \frac{l_i}{L_i}\right),$$

225   where the rate of growth $r(T,C)$ is given by a function of temperature multiplied by a function of C

226      $(r(T,C) = f(C)g(T))$,

227   Eqn. 24 $$f(C) = \frac{\alpha_c M_C}{\gamma_C + M_C},$$

228   Eqn. 25 $$g(T) = \begin{cases} 0 & T \leq 5^o C \\ A(T-5) & T > 5^o C \end{cases},$$

229   where γ_C is the mass of C when the root system is at half its maximum size, α_c is the strength of the

230   C effect and A is a fitting parameter determining the strength of temperature dependence on root

231   growth rate. Below critical temperature (5°C) there is no root growth and this reflects cold periods

232   over the winter (Sylvester-Bradley *et al.*, 2008).

233   **Fitting processCalibration**

234   The parameter list for the models above is given in Table 1. A subset of these parameters are fitted

235   to the experimental data and their values can be seen in Table 2. To begin the fitting

236   procedurecalibration process, the leaf model is first fit against the experimental leaf mass data, by

237   6 parameters (β_c, k_1, f_c, f_p for spring barley and in addition s_1 and s_2 for winter barley). In the leaf

238   model only, we set the rate of P entry from the xylem ($F(c,z,t)$, Eqn. 10) proportional to the

239   experimental plant P uptake to simulate a representative plant P root uptake. We then combine the

240   models, i.e. let the rate of P entry from the xylem be estimated from the root model, and fit for the

241   remaining parameters (γ_c and α_c).

242   During the fitting processcalibration step we minimise the sum of squares value between the

243   model's output for plant P uptake and leaf mass values against the experimental data values for

244   each the control and maximum applied P scenario (0 and 90/120 kg P ha^{-1} respectively). With the

245   fitted parameters we then run the model for all applied P scenarios.

246 The differences between modelling spring barley and winter barley are the time they are grown for

247 (151 and 313 days, respectively), the initial P profile in the soil (20 mg P l^{-1} decay profile and 16 mg P

248 l^{-1} constant profile, respectively) and leaf growth dependence (also depending upon air temperature

249 for winter barley).

250 **Results**

251 We compare two sets of barley field experimental data against the coupled model, the leaf model

252 (where plant P uptake is given by experimental data) and the root model. The aim is to address the

253 differences between the models and how well they fit the experimental field data for barley.

254 First we compare the values for plant P uptake between the root and coupled model for spring

255 barley at three different growth stages, GS31, GS45 and GS91 for seven applied P rates (0, 5, 10, 20,

256 30, 60 and 90 kg P ha^{-1}; Figure 2). The coupled model estimates higher plant P uptake compared to

257 the root model, better fitting the experimental data; staying within one standard deviation except at

258 high applied P rates (30, 60 and 90 kg P ha^{-1} at GS31, 20, 60 and 90 kg P ha^{-1} at GS45 and 30 and 60

259 kg P ha^{-1} at GS91). The feedback effect within the coupled model enables the root structure to

260 become larger than in the root model and therefore the roots explore more of the soil and hence

261 achieve an increased plant P uptake (Figure 8). The final model estimate (GS91) is more accurate

262 than the earliest (GS31) due to not capturing the effects of possible lateral root proliferation due to

263 higher applied P rates (Drew, 1975). Early differences are averaged out as the root system grows.

264 When considering plant P uptake in winter barley, the coupled model behaves similarly to the root

265 model (Figure 3). At GS92, both models under-predict plant P uptake for the same reasons as stated

266 in Heppell *et al.* (2015); the P profile is depleted which limits the amount of P available for uptake,

267 and perhaps the total amount of P in the soil was different to that estimated by the one soil test for

268 the whole site (Olsen P index 1). The effect of slow release P pools in the soil was not taken into

269 consideration due to the fact experimental data for this phenomenon was not available.

270   By coupling the root model with the leaf model we are able to compare measured leaf mass values

271   against the coupled and leaf model only for both spring barley (Figure 4) and winter barley (Figure 5)

272   for different applied P rates. The coupled model accurately predicts leaf mass at GS91 for spring

273   barley, however it estimates a more average value for earlier growth stages; not distinguishing any

274   differences between applied P rates. The large errors bars in the experimental leaf mass data are

275   possibly due to field variation, making it hard to distinguish any differences between applied P rates,

276   especially at later growth stages (the experimental differences are not statically significant). In

277   addition, the variation in experimental plant P uptake values for GS31 is less than for GS91 (18% to

278   24%), implying little correlation between early and late plant P uptake (adjusted r^2=0.4). For winter

279   barley, the coupled model is able to match leaf mass at GS39, but vastly underestimates leaf mass at

280   GS92 due to underestimating plant P uptake as mentioned above. The leaf model fits well across all

281   scenarios for spring and winter barley as it takes the known plant P uptake from the experimental

282   data as an input.

283   The leaf model component allows us to estimate P (Figure 6) and C mass (Figure 7) in the above

284   ground tissue over the growing period of the crop. The estimated P mass is higher in the leaf model

285   compared to the coupled model for both spring and winter barley. The estimated C mass is higher in

286   the leaf model compared to the coupled model for winter barley, but the other way around for

287   spring barley. In the winter barley case, the increased C and P masses in the leaf model are due to

288   higher plant P uptake values (Figure 3 compared to Figure 2) resulting in a larger end leaf mass. For

289   spring barley, C mass in the coupled model begins lower and ends higher compared to the leaf

290   model because plant P uptake by the root system also begins lower and ends higher (P uptake

291   remains constant in the leaf model). The sudden decrease in C and P mass, for winter barley, around

292   the 250 day mark is due to the enforced halting of the root growth rate.

293   The root growth rate is affected by C mass (spring barley) and also temperature (winter barley);

294   therefore different final root lengths can be observed between model simulations (Figure 8). The

295   leaf model created a longer root length compared to the coupled model in the winter barley

296   scenario due to the early differences in C mass. For spring barley, the early C mass values for the

297   coupled and leaf model were similar resulting in almost identical root growth rates and hence final

298   root lengths. As C mass increases above a certain value any differences are masked when affecting

299   the root growth rate. There was little difference in root length between the two different fertiliser

300   applications (0 and 90/120 kg P ha^{-1}), the largest being between the coupled model for winter barley

301   GS92. Due to the small increase in plant P uptake between scenarios (0 and 120 kg P ha^{-1}) there was

302   little effect on increasing root length via the slow feedback loop created by the addition of the leaf

303   model. Chemotropism effects from adding large amounts of P fertiliser could perhaps explain any

304   differences between plant P uptake values at early growth stages. In the winter barley scenario, as

305   root growth rate was dependent upon temperature, we see periods of no root growth matching

306   periods of low temperature, as expected.

307   Heppell *et al.* (2015) considered the effects of discrete placing of fertiliser within the root zone

308   against incorporating fertiliser throughout the soil for a range of cultivation options (mix 25, 20 and

309   10 cm, inverted plough, minimum tillage and no cultivation) for winter barley at GS92. We do the

310   same in this paper for the new coupled model (Figure 9). We arrive at the same overall conclusion,

311   placing fertiliser rather than incorporating achieves a higher plant P uptake estimate and under a

312   wet climate (x5 flux of water at soil surface), such as in the UK, this difference decreases (9.9% to 0.3%

313   and 9.8% to 4.5%) over no cultivation for a dry and wet climate respectively. Ploughing was also the

314   best cultivation option moving top soil P to a lower depth, making it more accessible to a

315   comparatively larger root system.

316   **Discussion**

317   In order to obtain a more accurate representation of the growth of barley throughout a crop life

318   cycle we have combined a below ground root-soil model with an above ground leaf model. By

319   combining the two models we are able to let an above ground process (photosynthesis) affect a

320 below ground process (root growth) and vice versa. C is created via photosynthesis in the leaf model

321 (dependent upon leaf mass and P) and stimulates root growth; increased root growth increases

322 plant P uptake and hence leaf mass. This positive feedback effect could explain why crops with early

323 plant P uptake levels grow more vigorously and can produce higher yields (Brenchley, 1929;

324 Boatwright and Viets, 1966; Green et al., 1973; Grant et al., 2001). Due to possible unfavourable (e.g.

325 dry) weather conditions, maximising early plant P uptake through greater root proliferation is also a

326 good strategy to help ensure continuing capture of soil resources at later stages of growth.

327 From the modelling work conducted we can postulate that the whole crop model accurately

328 estimates leaf mass at all growth stages given it has accurate estimates of plant P uptake (an average

329 difference of 4.6% for the whole crop model for leaf mass, compared to 15.8% when using values

330 one standard deviation away from the experimental data). Using the calibrated whole crop model

331 we found the optimal fertiliser and cultivation scenario is to use a plough and place the P fertiliser.

332 The largest increase in plant P uptake when placing fertiliser over incorporating fertiliser was 9.6%

333 (plough, dry climate). The difference between incorporating and placing has been long studied and

334 depends upon a range of criteria such as soil P concentration, soil temperature, crop species and

335 price (Devine et al., 1964; Mahler, 2001). Owusu-Gyimah et al. (2013) found that applying fertiliser

336 at a depth of 10 cm and 20 cm away from the plant (placed P) gave the best outcome for maize

337 growing under tropical conditions. By placing fertiliser instead of incorporating it throughout the soil

338 the available P is being put where the root system is going to grow hoping to ensure early plant P

339 uptake and a more successful crop. Hence Wager et al. (1986) found that P fertilizer application

340 rates could be halved by placing fertiliser instead of incorporation because the applied P was more

341 efficiently used. However, optimal fertiliser and cultivation methods depend on the initial soil P

342 condition/distribution (Randall and Hoeft, 1988); this includes at the depth at which existing P is

343 initially available within the soil (Heppell et al., 2015).

344 For modelling across countries it will be important to measure soil available P levels consistently, by

345 either using a common method or a set of common descriptors. Although, an international 'standard'

346 soil extraction method is not necessarily needed; rather employing a basic soil property (e.g.

347 sorption/buffer capacity) would be better to calibrate fertiliser recommendations. Modelling is the

348 most appropriate way to overcome the problems of site specificity in soil P supply that confound

349 current soil P test methods which do not apply to all soil types, i.e. across countries. Countries

350 generally adopt a particular standard method for soil P tests; many different extractants are used.

351 However, these do not necessarily give correlated results, for example across European laboratories

352 (Neyroud and Lischer, 2002; Jordan-Meille *et al.,* 2012). It is possible that a more robust soil test will

353 be developed in the future, that more accurately reflects immediate P availability to roots across

354 different soil types. For example, using Diffusive Gradient in Thin films (DGT) based on soil P

355 diffusion rates (Van Rotterdam *et al.*, 2009; Tandy *et al.*, 2011) or a method that mimics root P

356 acquisition traits (De Luca *et al.*, 2015). The use of more mechanistic approaches to calculate soil

357 available P levels via a more standardised test, or a combination of tests, enhances their applicability

358 across a wider variety of soil types and may lead to more accurate assessment of fertiliser needs

359 (Van Rotterdam *et al.,* 2014). Also, given that patterns of P concentration with depth in soil profiles

360 vary between sites (Jobbágy and Jackson, 2001), it may also be important to assess surface

361 stratification in no-tilled soils or in subsoils. Over-fertilising soils due to inaccurate estimation of

362 requirement, or mis-interpretation of soil P supply through inappropriate tests leads not only to

363 waste of finite reserves of phosphate-rock but also increased risk of P loss to water causing

364 eutrophication (Hooda *et al.,* 2001). By using knowledge about the distribution of P within the soil

365 and by modelling its implications, it should be possible to save on fertiliser costs by implementing

366 better optimised treatments through targeting P use (Yang *et al.,* 2013; Withers et al., 2014).

367 Furthermore, since crop and fertiliser management have long-term effects on topsoil and subsoil P

368 availability (Bolland and Baker, 1998), it will be important to validate the model over several years if

369 it is to improve on current simpler approaches to decision making. Additional model features would

370 be needed, such as effects between cropping seasons, but would make for a more overall

371 accomplished model. We note that the model would have to be calibrated separately for different

372 crops.

373 Although there was little response to P application observed in the field trial in terms of plant P

374 uptake at late growth stages (GS91 for spring barley and GS92 for winter barley), there was a

375 response at early growth stages (GS31 for spring barley and GS39 for winter barley). This early

376 response could imply that there were limiting environmental factors beyond nutritional inputs. Cold

377 and dry conditions in spring are known to inhibit the transport of P from the soil to the root (Grant

378 et al., 2001). However, if the measured 'low' P soil was an underestimation for the total amount of

379 available P in the soil then this could explain the lack of response at harvest observed in the field. In

380 addition, field variation could in part explain the early response to applied P; however as the root

381 system became larger during the latter growth stages any difference in plant P uptake and resulting

382 yield was evened out. Due to the complex nature of cereal physiology (Sylvester-Bradley *et al.*, 2008),

383 an early plant P uptake response does not necessarily indicate a higher final plant P uptake and yield;

384 because the plant compensates by taking up more P later on as temperatures warm up. The slow

385 feedback effect is a good explanation of the long term behaviour of the crop, and estimation of total

386 plant P uptake.

387 Potentially, new ways to improve efficiency use of P can now be developed by combining recent

388 advances in application technology, sensing technology, geo-spatial information and modelling so as

389 to apply P where it is needed and importantly not apply it where it is not needed. Precision farming

390 equipment is being widely adopted; now, its effective deployment depends on whether the vast

391 amount of data available about a given plot of land can be interpreted to improve the precision and

392 decrease the risks compared to current decision making (Sylvester-Bradley *et al.,* 1999). For example,

393 soil nutrient maps, past yield maps, soil and canopy sensors and climate predictions may provide

394 input data for integrated crop models to output quantitative predictions of fertiliser requirements so

395   that application as sowing can be adjusted in real time. However, the more immediate and

396   preliminary prospect is of using simulation models to compare scenarios of possible treatments, to

397   help guide future soil and fertiliser management strategies, and to accompany continuing field

398   testing.

399   **Acknowledgements**

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544   **List of Figures**

545   **Figure 1:** A flow diagram for the leaf model which estimates phosphate, leaf and carbon mass as

546   mathematically described by Eqn. 18-22.

547   **Figure 2:** Spring barley plant P uptake experimental data values for different applied P rates (0, 5, 10,

548   20, 30, 60 and 90 kg P ha^{-1}) with standard deviation, compared against estimates from the coupled

549   model and root model at GS31, 45, 91.

550   **Figure 3:** Winter barley plant P uptake experimental data values for different applied P rates (0, 15,

551   30, 60, 90 and 120 kg P ha^{-1}) with standard deviation, compared against estimates from the couple

552   model and root model at GS39 and 92.

553   **Figure 4:** Spring barley leaf mass experimental data values for different applied P rates (0, 5, 10, 20,

554   30, 60 and 90 kg P ha^{-1}) with standard deviation, compared against estimates from the coupled

555   model and leaf model at GS31, 45, 91.

556   **Figure 5:** Winter barley leaf mass experimental data values for different applied P rates (0, 15, 30, 60,

557   90 and 120 kg P ha^{-1}) with standard deviation, compared against estimates from the coupled model

558   and leaf model at GS39 and 92.

559   **Figure 6:** Estimated phosphate mass values from the coupled model and leaf model for a) spring

560   barley and b) winter barley at GS91, 92 respectively for 0 kg P ha^{-1} and 90/120 kg P ha^{-1}.

561   **Figure 7:** Estimated carbon mass values from the coupled model and leaf model for a) spring barley

562   and b) winter barley at GS91, 92 respectively for 0 kg P ha^{-1} and 90/120 kg P ha^{-1}.

563   **Figure 8:** Estimated plant root length values from the root model, coupled model and leaf model for

564   a) spring barley and b) winter barley at GS91, 92 respectively for 0 kg P ha^{-1} and 90/120 kg P ha^{-1}.

565   **Figure 9:** Estimated plant P uptake values for winter barley at GS92 for a set of fertiliser and soil

566   management strategies (mix 25, 20 and 10cm, inverted plough, minimum tillage and no cultivation,

567   and either no fertiliser, 90 kg P ha^{-1} incorporated or 90 kg P ha^{-1} placed) for a normal climate and a

568   wetter climate (x5 flux of water at soil surface).

569   **List of Tables**

570 **Table 1: A list of the parameters used for the 3 models: leaf, root and coupled.**

Parameter	Definition	Value	Units
	Leaf Model (Values from Thornley, J. H., 1995)		
k_G	Leaf growth rate constant	1000	$\left(\dfrac{\text{kg C}}{\text{kg Leaf}}\dfrac{\text{kg P}}{\text{kg Leaf}}\text{day}\right)^{-1}$
k_{litt}	Leaf litter rate constant	0.05	day^{-1}
k_{mlitt}	Leaf litter Michealis-Menten constant	0.5	kg Leaf
k_C	Photosynthesis constant	0.1	$\dfrac{\text{kg C}}{\text{kg Leaf}}\text{day}^{-1}$
k_M	Leaf self-shading constant	1	kg Leaf
J_C	Carbon product inhibition constant	0.1	$\dfrac{\text{kg C}}{\text{kg Leaf}}$
f_c	Fraction of C used for leaf growth	(fitted)	$\dfrac{\text{kg C}}{\text{kg Leaf}}$
f_p	Fraction of P used for leaf growth	(fitted)	$\dfrac{\text{kg P}}{\text{kg Leaf}}$
k_1	P used for photosynthesis	(fitted)	$\dfrac{\text{kg Leaf}}{\text{kg P}}$
k_p	P:C ratio for photosynthesis production	0.005-0.05	$\dfrac{\text{kg P}}{\text{kg C}}$
β_p	Rate of P output to phloem	0	$\dfrac{\text{kg Leaf}}{\text{day}}$
F	Rate of P entry from xylem	Taken from barley experimental data or root model output	$\dfrac{\text{kgP}}{\text{day}}$
A_T	Air temperature	Taken from Local	$°C$

		Met office MIDAS stations	
β_c	Rate of C output to phloem	(fitted)	$\dfrac{\text{kgL}}{\text{day}}$
s_1	Air temperature slope constant	(fitted)	-
s_2	Air temperature transition constant	(fitted)	$°C$
Root-Soil Model (values from Heppell *et al.,* 2015)			
D_0	Water diffusivity	10^3	$\text{cm}^2\text{day}^{-1}$
K_s	Water hydraulic conductivity	5	$\text{cm}^2\text{day}^{-1}$
D_f	P diffusivity in free water	10^{-5}	$\text{cm}^2\text{day}^{-1}$
d	Impedance factor	2	-
a	Main order root radius	0.085	cm
a_1	first order root radius	0.060	cm
k_r	Root radial water conductivity	7.85×10^{-6}	$\text{m}^2\text{s}^{-1}\text{MPa}^{-1}$
k_z	Root axial hydraulic conductivity	1.198×10^{-2}	$\text{m}^4\text{Pa}^{-1}\text{s}^{-1}$
ψ_1	Density of first order roots	2.33	cm^{-1}
p_r	Root internal xylem pressure	1	Pa
p_c	Characteristic suction pressure	0.0232	MPa
L_0	Max length of main order root	150	cm
L_1	Max length of first order root	7.9	cm
L	Root tip position	$0\text{-}L_0$	cm
b	Buffer power	23.28	-
θ	Angle between the main root and first order branches	60	degrees
ϕ	Porosity of soil	0.3	-
p_r^0	Initial root internal xylem pressure	1	Pa

λ_1	Root internal xylem pressure parameter	$2.7*10^{-3}$	Pa/ degC
λ_2	Root internal xylem pressure parameter	$8.46*10^{-4}$	Pa/% humidity
λ_3	Root internal xylem pressure parameter	$7.9*10^{-2}$	Pa
δ	Flux of water parameter	$2.69*10^{-2}$	-
α	Flux of water parameter	$1.2*10^{-6}$	m s^{-1} of water
β	Flux of water parameter	$2.22*10^{-6}$	m s^{-1} of water/degC
γ	Flux of water parameter	$5.35*10^{-4}$	m s^{-1} of water/ m s^{-1} of air
E	Flux of water parameter	$5*10^{-4}$	m s^{-1} of water
l_w	Bottom of the soil	200	cm
Coupled Model			
γ_C	Root carbon growth parameter	(fitted)	-
α_c	Strength of carbon effect on root growth	(fitted)	-
A	Strength of temperature dependence on root growth rate	0.0780	-

571

572 **Table 2: The fitted parameter set for the leaf and coupled models, for spring barley and winter**

573 **barley.**

Parameter		Value for Spring barley	Value for winter barley
Leaf Model	β_c	0.0001	0.0001

	k_1	100	859
	f_c	0.5	0.5
	f_p	$7*10^{-4}$	$1.6*10^{-3}$
	s_1	n/a	20.78
	s_2	n/a	-1.446
Coupled model	γ_C	$1.30*10^{-5}$	$1.31*10^{-4}$
	α_c	1	1.982

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